

[Miss Lucy]

Revision code # 4 C SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: MISS LUCY

Date of First Writing December 14, 1938

Name of Person Interviewed Mrs. Lucy Price (white)

Fictitious Name _____

Street Address Clifton Mill Village

Place Clifton, S.C.

Occupation Housewife

Name of Writer David A. Mathewes

Name of Reviser David A. Mathewes

"'Twas right thar in that house I met Mr. Price an' me an' him got married an' now I cooks an' keeps house fer him an' his boy. The boy, he works in the mills nights, you know, an' he needs woman food like cakes, puddin' an' sech as well as wholesomes. They appreciates me, you bet, atter them two fussin' away har by theirselves atter Mr. Price's fust two wives done died. Jest undo the gate an' come on up. They ain't nothin' to keep in er out that gate but it locks right pruty, don't you think? We ain't got nothin' much, but what's har is ourn, an' hit's all paid fer. We don't owe nobody nothin'." C10 - [?][?]-[?][?]

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The small two-room cabin was perched on the side of a rather steep hill in Clifton Mill village. Unpainted, it was of clap-board construction, with a tin roof. Some two dozen stone steps led from the gate to the door. Several scrawny post-oak trees, in front and back, furnished dubious shade. A few scanty zinnias, several hollyhock stalks, and scattered clumps of violets gave evidence that Miss Lucy had attempted a flower garden. In the rear and further up the hill was the customary turnip patch.

Miss Lucy was standind, broadly smiling a welcome. Tall and lanky, with brownish-gray hair slapped down from a middle part to a knot at the back, pale-blue childish eyes behind steel-rimmed glasses, she was dressed as usual, in a checked gingham wrapper with round-collared neck, elbow length sleeves, gathered waist, and over that a full apron, bow-tied in back. The dress was long, but failed to conceal thick legs, covered with tan cotton stockings, and brown canvas tennis shoes tightly laced over shapeless ankles.

“Come in an' set,” she invited. It was about four o'clock of a winter afternoon and the dull light dealt kindly with the room's meager furnishings. The low ceiling was whitewashed, but the walls were covered with carefully trimmed and fitted cartonnage, the original use of which had evidently been as containers for various brands of canned goods. The room had three windows; the front window showed the road, the back one had the wood pile to offer, and the side view was only that of a next-door cabin, almost the twin of Miss Lucy's.

A brown metal bed was spread with a blanket and was pushed lengthwise along the front wall. An alarm clock was strapped by a cast-off 3 suspender to the cross-bar at the head of the bed, to afford its owner the convenience of stopping its shrill ring without rising. Under the side window stood a long unpainted table with a white oilcloth cover. Upon it were several pans of food, all carefully covered with cotton cloths. A low shelf with two large pails upon it, and a tin dipper hanging above, occupied all the space along the back wall as far as the door. Under the back window at the left of the door was a large oil

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cooking stove and from the ceiling above a small center table there hung an old-fashioned kerosene oil lamp.

“Want a drink of water before we set? Wait, I'll git some fresh.” Stepping out on the tiny back porch she proceeded to draw from the well at one end of it a brimming bucket of water. “Here, jest fetch that dipper an' you'll taste as sweet water's there is in the whole village, or anywheres else fer that matter.”

Miss Lucy sat in the one slat-back rocker drawn up to the two-hole laundry heater and the visitor occupied one of the three straight chairs in the room. “This here 'round the stove is our what you all call livin' room,” explained Miss Lucy. “Hit ain't much, but hit does.”

Two full scuttles of coal stood behind the stove. A carved walnut clock ticked from the mantle, and beneath it was tacked an insurance company envelope in which was placed the weekly premium, in readiness for the collector. Also tacked to the walls around the room were numerous picture-calendars and a large chrome of the Nation's Capital; on nails hung a pair of scissors, odd shoestrings, and other bric-a-brac. Hanging squarely over the mantle was a large framed red and gold card, “God bless Our Home.”

“That door over there,” Miss Lucy pointed out, “is Mr. Price's son's 4 room. Don't talk aloud none, 'cause he's in there 'sleep now. He works at nights you know, an' since he brings in the money we mostly has to do on, I figure he's 'titled to his sleep. He's worked in the mill for quite a spell, ever since Mr. Price had to quit his job as night watchman at the mill. He jest got so plumb porely he had to give up. So we're plenty thankful the boy is here, fer if hit warn't that he's got work in the mill we couldn't live here no more 'less we paid a lots more rent. He makes good money, too - sixteen dollars, I believe. Don't know what we'll do if'n he ever takes a notion to git married and have a family of his own. But I reckon we'd make out somehow. People allus does.

“Mr. Price, now, he ain't been enjoyin' good health a'tall. He suffers from cardiac asthma, rheumatiz, poor eyesight, an' then he has them spells with his heart, too. Sometimes

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they's real bad. He ain't been able to do nothin' much since he broke his glasses. That wus when the boy went to work. Hit took me an' the boy a right smart spell to save 'nough money to git him a'nother pair of specs. Course, Mr. Price couldn't do nothin' in the way of work 'till we got 'em fer him so he jest set. An', while he wus settin' and waitin', seems like he jest got so much in the habit of hit, he ain't never been able to quit. Some folks think I'm daffy to spend my money fer him, but I reckon what's his'n is mine an' what's mine is his'n. Leastways, that wus the way I figgered when I married him an' 'fore he quit work he spent his money on me.

“You noticed that thar pile of wood an' coal back o' the house? Likely 'nough to do us all winter, I hope so anyways. Well, I bought an' paid for hit every bit. An' a'nother thing, I bought that thar axe. The 5 old one was so nicked an' dull 'twas a heap o' trouble fer me to split kindlin'. . . . All with my wages from that boardin' house in town where I works in summer.

“No, I tried to be a good wife an' I thinks I is. One thing I'm glad of, though. While I wus working in town last, Mr. Price, he sold the cow. Hit suited me fine, for one thing I hates is to milk. We tried keepin' chickens once but hit didn't work. If'n they warn't stole, they was allus ramblin' off layin' som'ers else. So we et what we had left 'fore 'twas too late.

“Where's Mr. Price? Why, he's so hoarse with a cold he can't hardly talk. But he's gone over yonder to the store to set awhile. Seems like if'n he couldn't git over thar to hear the news an' git in his sayso on hit the whole community, I reckon, would go to rack an' rain. What? Oh, they jest sets 'round the stove when hit's cold an' outside when hit's hot and talks 'bout everythin', I reckons. Mostly politics seems like. Mr. Price, he talks 'bout this an' that but he don't worry 'bout hit much fer's I know.

“We gits this har house purty reasonable, an' 'fore Mr. Price quit his work we got 'long all right, an' then the boy he got work, an' we still gits 'long all right. We ain't never been on no relief an' if'n I had to, I reckon I could allus git me a job cookin' steady agin. No, I can't

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read none, but when I hears talk 'bout the hard times some people is havin' I reckon we's mighty lucky. We allus has plenty of eats an' hit's wholesome."

She was apparently absorbed in thought for a few moments, then continued, "Er else we's reasonable. We don't have no attermobile, ner 6 no radio, ner no other sech finenesses, but what we got is ourn, an' we live comfortable. We don't 'spect much more'n that with jest one workin', but mebbe next spring I kin cook out some more an' git 'nough for a radio. Hit would be real company if'n I could learn to work hit. I gits real lonesome settin' har sometimes makin' Mr. Price or his son some shirts or underwear; or darnin' - 'specially when they ain't nobody har but me. You know, cookin' is my long suit, but I can sew as well. to my mind, folks ain't got no business talkin' po'mouth an' then gittin' all these store-boughten clothes. Not when they's somebody in they family can sew an' ain't got no business else much to tend to. I could tell you some tall tales 'bout money th'own 'way right har on this hill by folks that is on relief. An' some of 'em wouldn't work nohow at a regular job long's they can git vittles and sech free. But I reckon hit's all right. The money's got to be spent some way so's poor folks can git aholt of it.

Pausing long enough to drop several lumps of coal into the stove, she resumed: "'Pears like hit goes to most of 'ems' head, though. Now up in Jackson County, in North Carolina, where I was born an' raised, ever'body was agin the Democrats; though I didn't do no votin', ner no other women folks neither. That wus a man's job, fer hit was mostly liquor drinkin' an' fightin'. But seems like the Republicans let us folks down; least I hears so. An' Mr. Price an' his son says so. 'Cordin' to them, the hardest times ever wus when they sold out to the rich folks an' wus goin' to let the poor folks starve plumb to death if'n this har [?]. Roosevelt hadn't come 'long. I don't know nothin' much 'bout that, though. I wus lucky. I wus workin' in the boardin' house then an' while I didn't git no money much, jest three dollars a week, I had a place to sleep an' 7 allus plenty to eat. An', you know, if'n a body's got her health, a little money an' them two, they don't have to go beggin' fer no help.

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"No, we don't mix none much in politics, 'specially local. Hit's a whole lot better not to, 'less'n a body's got some powerful good reason. Jest politickin' ain't never done nobody no good if'n they ain't in it theirselves. So we jest votes like ever'body else 'round har mostly does - Democrat. Course, I don't reckon none of them's perfect like they claim, but hit do 'pears like the Democrats has anyhow tried to help them as couldn't git jobs er couldn't help theirselves, even if they was wantin' to. Hit like I say, we ain't never been on relief nor had to git help but I know some real good folks what would jest natcherly stole er starved if they hadn't got on relief 'cause they couldn't git work. They wus tryin', too. But they's a passel of 'em gittin' help that don't belong to. They's jest dead beats; ain't never worked at no regular work an' wouldn't take it if'n hit was th'owed at 'em. Course Mr. Roosevelt don't know 'em an' no can't help hit, but whar they live they is knowed."

They got [?] to place a pot upon the stove, and light the latter, and then resumed her seat. "You say you've fished in Jackson County? Well, then, you shore know my home country - Cashier's Valley. Lordy, ain't them shore 'nough mountains up thar? Ain't nothin' but mountains 'ceptin' the floor o' the valley an' hit ain't noways even. Huh, people down har call this har what we live on a purty steep hill. They ain't seen nothin' has they? Ever'time I see somebody what knows what hills really is, hit sorta makes me homesick. I reckon them hills'll still be thar jest as usual when ever'body done gone an' Gabriel horn has blowed.

"My raisin'? Shore, hit ain't much to tell 'bout. Hit was all in 8 Cashier's Valley 'til I wus 'bout nineteen year old. I didn't know nothin' till then an' had a chanct to go to Hendersonville with some summer folks as their maid. I didn't like maiden' so much, but twarn't long attar 'til the cook took sick an' bein' as my maw had teached me to cook wholesome vittles right (my paw was allus real partickler 'bout his food) I fell into the job. An' when the regular cook come back to work, the summer folks - they liked my cookin' better, an' told her they didn't need her no more. That's how I come to be a regular cook. I worked for these summer folks 'till they left Hendersonville, an' then I got a job with Miz

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Mac. She was runnin' a boardin' house then in Hendersonville, same as she does now in Spartanburg. I worked for her so long an' we got 'long so good that when she decided to move to Spartanburg an' open a boardin' house she wouldn't hear 'bout me not comin' 'long to cook. Hit suited me all right 'cause she allus treated me right, an' I was wantin' to see somethin' outside the mountains anyhow.

"What? Now suh, you're jest a'teasin' me. No, I didn't do much courtin' fore I married Mr. Price. I wus kept purty strict a eye on when I was agrowin' up. Folks up thar in the hills seems like thinks a heap more of gittin' talked 'bout than they do down har. An' my pappy, he was proud of his name even if'n he didn't have no l'arnin'. When younguns up thar started keepin' company it most generally meant a real old-timey weddin' right soon. An' then some shore 'nough celebratin' wus done. All night mostly. An' then sometimes the fever'd hit some o' them what has been sorta shyin' off an' they'd mebbe git spliced too. That is, if'n the old folks thought hit wus all right. Course, I've knowed o' folks nowadays call 'shot-gun weddin's' but they wus mighty few an' not 9 near so much needed as 'pears to be thar is now.

"I didn't have no time much for frolicin' when I was growin' up. Ever'body kept busy workin' while they could, plantin' corn, cabbages, pertaters, an' sech - women folks as well as men. Then we made jest 'bout ever'thing we used, clothes too. People - chilluns, too - really worked in them days. They warn't 'fraid 'to back-up to hit' like heaps of 'em is these times. Course I don't think folks ought to go back to old ways [?], 'specially regardin' the chilluns. 'Tain't right fer them to work, an' schoolin' is allus a good thing, an' many's the time I wish I'd had gone. Least 'nough to read by. Why, even my little nieces an' nevvies can read an' write now, an' they don't even have to walk to school. Folks comes by in a big yaller ottermobile thing an' picks 'em up an' sets 'em down.

"What? Oh well, if'n you're boun' to know, oncet I was really in love an' I would of married him too, if'n things had of been so's we could. But he'd been in the Navy an' got somethin' wrong with his insides. Some folks said hit was bad liquor but I never did believe that. An'

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when I fust knowed him he wus in the Government Hospital in Augusta. How come I to know him? Oh, he had a sister what worked fer Miz Mac as maid, an' he used to come to visit her sometimes when he could git off. Hit wus love at fust sight with me an' I believe hit was with him. He warn't as old as me (I was 'bout fifty-five then) but that didn't make no diffuns to me. Lordy, I like to [?] died when his sister got word that he had died d [?] in Uncle Sam's' hospital. I felt so plumb bad I had to take the day off an' git Miz Mac to do the cookin' that day. She was right smart put out 'bout hit fer she had a sight o' boarders but I jest warn't up to doin' 10 no more right then.

"I never could 'bide no more men atter that. That is, fer as havin' dates er anythin'. Fer as that goes, I never did have no time much fer sech. If these har young gals I hear talkin' nowadays, think they has a hard time goin' to work in a comfortable store whar they can see diffun things an' talk to diffun people, at eight o'clock an' gittin' off at five; er like some o' these gals that work in the mill, allus fussin' 'bout somethin', why they jest ought to try oncet cookin' in a boardin' house. A body ain't never done. But hit makes up fer hit when somebody comes back to the kitchen an' tells you how good somethin' tasted, er tries to wheedle you into makin' their fav'rite dish. An' don't you think cooks don't have their fav'rites 'mong the boarders, too. Some - hits a pleasure to fix extra fer, an' some - you would a heap druther poison. Oh, well, cookin' ain't so bad, hard work as hit is, if'n you're workin' fer somebody like Miz Mac. She warn't all time perniddlin' 'round an' interferin' with a body. In her kitchen the cook's the boss. But she better know what's she's adoin' an' do hit right."

Getting up, Miss Lucy placed another pot of something upon the oil stove, lighting another burner and stirring the contents of the first pot. Then vigorously shaking down the ashes in the heater, she added a few more lumps of coal and again took her seat.

"How'd I happen to git married? Well, I tell you, that wus sort o' accident-like. Ethel, she was the sister of that thar feller I wus tellin' you 'bout. Well, she noticed in the paper whar Mr. Price wanted a house-keeper for hisself an' his boy an' bein' as times wus purty hard

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'round the boardin' house she went to see him. But, Lordy, Mr. Price warn't wantin' 11 jest a housekeeper. Ethel said soon as she talked to him she knowed he wanted a wife. So bein' as she is a whole lot younger than me, she thought 'bout me. An' she come to me an' told 'bout this har openin'. So we went to see Mr. Price an' shore 'nough, hit was marryin' he was thinkin' o'.

"Miz Mac like'n to of took a fit when I told her i wus quittin' to git married. She wanted me to wait, but shucks, if'n a body's done decided somethin' they ain't no use to wait. So I jest told her, 'I'm plumb tired o' slavin' all the time fer somebody else. I got this chancet an' I'm agonna let somebody work fer me fer a change. Mr. Price, he's got a good job as night watchman at the mill an' him with a big gold watch chain an' all like he has, I jest know he'll pervide good fer me.' An' he woulda if'n his ailments hadn't made him have to quit his work.

"Hit was right funny when Mr. Price come up thar an' told Miz Mac 'bout us agonna git married. Course, I didn't have no money but he jest gaved her a twenty dollar bill an' told her, "Miz Mac, I'm agonna take your cook fer to be my wife an' I'd 'preciate your takin' her down town an' buyin' her a dress fitten to git married in. I reckon hit's sorta inconcienient fer you but I hopes you don't mind too much.'

"So that's how come me to be married. Course hit ain't worked out like hit looked like hit wus agonna, but still an' all, I reckon, I ain't got no kick. Hit does look like I'm still aworkin' jest like I allus have, but even so, hit's sorta more pleasurable to be workin' in your own home an' for your own family. [An'?] I reckon long's the boy is satisfied 'thout no wife an' family o' his own, we'll git along all right. An' I ain't gonna do no worryin' 'bout that till I has to. I knows I can allus git me a job cookin' if'n I has to. That's one thing hard times don't interfere 12 with. People is allus gonna eat.

"My goodness, I better stir them grits. You know, jest settin' har atalkin' I might near done let meal time slip up on me, an' hit's 'bout time to wake the boy. Won't you stay an' eat

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with us? You might not git to eat my cookin' so much longer, you know. Course, I'm plum healthy, but a body never knows. My mammy an' pappy wus both dead an' buried 'fore I [won?] knowed anythin' 'bout hit. That's right. I never even knowed they wus ailin'. Course hit warn't nobody's fault. My sister what could write, can't see so good now, an' hit would of been hard fer her to write me. Well, 'twarn't much I could of done, nohow. Sorta put me in mind of somethin' a summer lady oncet told me. I reckon hit purty nigh fits, too. She asked me my name oncet an' when I told her "Lucy," she spoke a piece which I got her to write down for me. Hit was 'She live unknown an' few could know when Lucy ceased to be.'"